

MAKING SENSE OF ETHNIC AND RACIAL POSITIONING AWAY FROM HOME:
CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

Tianhao Zhang: Making Sense of Ethnic and Racial Positioning Away from Home: Chinese Students in the United States and Japan
(Under the direction of Jacqueline M. Hagan)

Drawing on interviews with Chinese international students in the United States and Japan, this thesis examines two aspects of migrants' perceptions of the positioning of ethnic and racial groups in host societies: 1) how they see the relative positions of various groups in the host society; 2) what frames they use for interpreting such positioning of groups. First, I find that migrants' perceptions of positioning of ethnic and racial groups are similar to that of the native-born, though with some differences. Second, I find that migrants use a wide range of frames to explain the observed relative positions of groups, and these frames can deviate from those used by the natives.

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INTRODUCTION

How do migrants of the same national origin perceive the positioning of ethnic and racial groups in different host societies? Drawing on interviews with Chinese international students in the United States and Japan, this thesis examines two aspects of migrants' perceptions of the positioning of ethnic and racial groups in host societies: 1) how they see the relative positions of various groups in the host society; 2) what frames they use for interpreting such positioning of groups. First, I find that migrants' perceptions of positioning of ethnic and racial groups are similar to that of the native-born, though with some differences. Second, I find that migrants use a wide range of frames to explain the observed relative positions of groups, and these frames can deviate from those used by the natives.

Race and Ethnicity and Migration

How do we study migrants' ideas about race and ethnicity in host societies? Drawing upon the group position theory of racial attitudes, this paper proposes that one potential beginning point is to look at how migrants perceive the relative positions of ethnic and racial groups in host societies and how they make sense of such positioning. As originally advocated by Herbert Blumer in his classic paper on racial prejudice, the group position theory states that "racial feelings point to and depend on a positional arrangement of the racial groups." (1958:4) As demonstrated in the quote, this theory proposes that individuals cannot think about one specific ethnic or racial group without simultaneously comparing it to other groups, including one's own (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1999). Therefore, to study migrants' ideas about any race or ethnicity in a host society necessitates studying their ideas about how each ethnic or racial group

is positioned relative to other groups.

In their effort to corroborate the theory empirically, Bobo and Tuan have shown that the sense of group position has significant impacts on Whites' attitudes towards claims regarding fishing rights made by Native Americans (2006). Extending the theory beyond its original focus on the dominant group's racial prejudice towards subordinate groups, Bobo and Hutchings find that sense of group position also affects how minority groups view the dominant group as well as other minorities (1996). However, few studies have directly examined how exactly minority groups perceive positions of ethnic and racial groups in a society. While previous studies assume an objective positioning of groups based on historical relations and structural inequality among various groups (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996), it is possible that some groups, especially recent immigrants who are not familiar with the ethnic and racial history of the host society, can perceive the positioning of ethnic and racial groups differently from the mainstream perspective. Furthermore, recent studies have demonstrated inter-group and intra-group differences in views towards policies regarding ethnic and racial matters and immigration among immigrant populations (Masuoka & Junn, 2013; Lee & Tran, 2019). Based on the group position theory, examining how exactly migrants perceive and understand relative positions of major ethnic and racial groups can be the first step to better understand such differences.

More pertinent to this study, the group position theory explicitly states that the positioning of groups can assume both forms of vertical hierarchy and non-vertical arrangement characterized by inclusion and exclusion (Blumer, 1958; Bobo). Therefore, the concept of group positions can be applied to social contexts with dissimilar structures of positional arrangements of ethnic and racial groups.

Having demonstrated the usefulness of the concept of positions of groups and the value

of studying migrants' perceptions on this topic, the remaining question is how to make sense of migrants' ideas about relative positions of various groups in host societies? Blumer argues that groups develop their sense of group positioning from a historical process in which the dominant group "define(s) and redefines(s) the subordinate racial group and the relations between them." (1958: 5) This conceptualization seems to pose challenges to studying recent migrants, since they might not possess sufficient experiences in the destination country to form senses of group positions.

However, a closer reading of the group position theory proves that the observed misfit between the theory and the task at hand is only superficial. Blumer theorizes that the process of defining groups and group relations is often not based on concrete experiences of individuals. Rather, it happens "in the area of the remote," such as "the press and the printed world," and it tends to create an "abstract image" of the other groups (1958:6) This formulation suggests that recent migrants can perceive and make sense of positioning of various ethnic and racial groups in a host society even without sufficient individual experiences regarding ethnic and racial matters within the society, because they can acquire discourses regarding group positions conveyed through such public arenas.

From the perspective of cultural sociology, such publicly available messages are cultural resources constituting a given society's cultural repertoire, which is "a set of tools available to individuals to make sense of the reality they experience (Lamont et al., 2016: 21)." Culture repertoire is often associated with the tool-kit perspective of explaining the relation between culture and action, which suggests that people can interpret their experiences by using easily available cultural resources within a given society, even when their personal experiences do not lead to full embracement of those ideas (Swidler, 1986; 2003).

In fact, Michele Lamont and her co-authors have shown that public discourses and frames regarding race and ethnicity available within a society shape minority groups' and immigrants' understandings of their experiences of race and ethnicity in that society (2016). Comparing experiences of African Americans in the United states, Black Brazilians in Brazil, and finally, Arab Palestinians, Ethiopian Jews, and Mizrahi Jews living in Israel, they find that similar experiences of ethnic and racial discriminations are interpreted differently, leading to varying strategies of anti-discrimination (2016). Therefore, new migrants may still employ ideas popular in host societies when making sense of ethnic and racial matters, even though their individual experiences in destinations are limited.

On the other hand, migrants may also bring ideas about race and ethnicities based on home country experiences and apply them to understand the ethnic and racial phenomena in the host society. Recent studies on race and migration have highlighted the transnational nature of migrants' ideas about race and ethnicity. In her study of Central Americans in North Carolina, Vanesa Ribas finds that racial systems in home countries "preconditions" Latino/a migrant workers' views towards their African American co-workers in the United States (2015). Similarly, Wendy Roth and Nadia Kim show that prejudiced attitudes towards African Americans held by Dominican and Korean immigrants are partially brought with them from racial discourses in their home countries, which often reflect globalized media representations of racial groups in the United States (2013). Therefore, even though migrants may draw upon popular ideas in host societies when explaining ethnic and racial matters, they also bring with them homeland ideas about race and ethnicity.

Building on this research, this thesis examines how Chinese international students perceive the positioning of ethnic and racial groups and how they explain the observed relative

positions of groups in two host societies: Japan and the United States. Goffman define frames as “principles of organization which govern events...and our subjective involvement in them (1974, 10).” Following Bonilla-Silva’s use of frames of racial ideology, frames in this paper are defined as organized principles of interpreting the positioning of ethnic and racial groups – “set paths of interpreting information” (Bonilla-Silva 2017, 74). This thesis explores directly the positioning of ethnic and racial groups in host societies from migrants’ own perspective. In addition, my comparative approach enables both a closer examination of how national contexts influence migrants’ perceptions and explanations of positioning of various groups in host societies, as well as what ideas about race and ethnicity are transnational, i.e., imported from home and shared by both groups.

This thesis is organized into four sections. I start with an overview of the literature on the relative positions of ethnic and racial groups and frames of understanding ethnic and racial issues in each of the related sites, including the United states, Japan, and the home country of the respondents, China. I then proceed with an outline of research methodology. I follow with findings from the U.S. case and that of the Japanese case. Findings from interviews with Chinese students in each site are organized into two sub-sections: 1) perceived positioning of ethnic and racial groups within the host society; 2) frames for interpreting the perceived positioning. Finally, I conclude and discuss my findings and contributions within the broader literature

POSITIONING & FRAMING ETHNIC & RACIAL GROUPS IN NATIONAL CONTEXTS

The positioning of different ethnic and racial groups and frames for understanding these relative positions vary substantially across the United States, Japan, and China. Based on a careful review of the literature in each country, I have summarized these differences in Table 1. In the United States, different ethnic and racial groups are ranked vertically according to their objective socioeconomic outcomes as well as symbolic meanings attached to each group. While there are multiple proposed orderings of the groups by different scholars, one contemporary agreement is that while Whites occupy the top, Blacks are at the bottom, with other groups (especially Asians and Latinos) in between. (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Kim, 1999; Masuoka & Juun, 2013).

In Japan, despite the common myth that it is a nation of “one race” (The Japan Times, 2005), scholars have argued that term “Japanese” is actually a racialized category, and the ethnic and racial demarcation line in Japan is the divide between Japanese and foreigner (Kawai, 2015). In addition, studies have found that Japanese have more favorable attitudes towards foreigners from western nations and more negative attitudes toward those from other Asian nations, suggesting a hierarchy among foreigners in Japan (Tanabe, 2008; Igarashi, 2008).

Table 1. Positioning and Framing Ethnic and Racial Groups in the United States, Japan, and China

	United States	Japan	China
Positioning of Ethnic and Racial groups	Hierarchy based on race and ethnicity	Japanese/ Foreigner	Han/ Ethnic Minority
		Hierarchy of foreigners based on nationality	Chinese/ Foreigner
			Hierarchy of foreigners based on nationality
Ethnic and Racial Frames	Liberalism/Individualism	Uniqueness of Japaneseness	Social Darwinism
	Naturalization of Racial Matters	Xenophobia	Racialized Nationalism
	Cultural Racism	Multiculturalism	
	Minimization of Racism		
	Universalism		

Multiple ways of positioning ethnic and racial groups exist in China. First, there is a divide between the dominant Han ethnicity and ethnic minorities living in China (Dikötter, 2015; Harrell, 2011). Second, some scholars argue that racial discourses in China tend to “mystify and essentialize” the racial cohesion of the Chinese race, suggesting a divide between Chinese and foreigners similar to that of Japan (Cheng, 2011:678). Lastly, survey studies regarding Chinese’ attitudes towards foreigners have shown hierarchical ordering of foreigners of different regions (Sautman, 1994).

The bottom half of Table 1 summarizes frames regarding ethnic and racial issues in the three societies. Bonilla-Silva argues that color-blindness is the dominant racial ideology in contemporary United States which allows privileged groups to support racial domination without being racist. He identifies four central color-blind frames used to justify racial inequality without sounding racist: abstract liberalism, naturalization of racial matters, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (2017). Abstract liberalism is the frame that applies “ideas associated

with political liberalism ... and economic liberalism (e.g. choice, individualism)” to explain ethnic and racial issues (Bonilla-Silva, 2017:76). Similarly, Lamont and colleagues (2016) identify an individualism frame that stresses the importance of individual achievement on overcoming racial discriminations. The Naturalization frame suggests that “racial phenomena ... are natural occurrence,” and the tendency for people to “gravitate toward likeness” is “almost biologically driven.” (Bonilla-Silva, 2017:76) Cultural racism is the frame that attributes the cause of a group’s position in the society to proposed group specific cultures. Finally, minimization of racism is the frame that downplays the effects of discrimination on “minorities’ life chances.” (Bonilla-Silva, 2017:77). On the other hand, Lamont and colleagues (2016) show that Americans also draw on the universalism frame in their anti-racism discourses, which emphasizes the equality of all human races.

The uniqueness of Japanese-ness is a frame that essentializes Japan as a homogenous nation-state and “symbolize(s) the unity of the cultural community of this peaceful nation.” (Oguma, 2002:322) This frame works to deny ethnic and racial diversity within the country. Racism against ethnic minorities in Japan either fails to reach public discourse or simply passes as xenophobia, or the “fear of foreigners.” (Kawai, 2015; Park, 2017:65). Xenophobia, then, constitutes another major frame of talking about racial and ethnic matters in Japan. Finally, accompanying recent influx of international migration into Japan, multiculturalism – which “affirms cultural diversity within a nation” – has gained popularity among public discourses on the incorporation of newcomers (Nagayoshi, 2011: 562; Kashiwazaki, 2013).

In China, a Social Darwinist discourse of race persists, which can be traced to the late 19th century when the modern system of categorizing human races based on skin colors was introduced to China. Different levels of development of the regions are thought to be reflecting

the qualities of the races populating these regions, resulting in a global racial hierarchy (Dikötter, 2015; Lan, 2016). For instance, being associated with Third World countries, Africans are deemed as primitive, culturally backward, with the least interest in education and little political capacity (Sautman, 1994). This Social Darwinist framework is also applied to internal ethnic diversity: societies of the minority people are classified as more primitive, while the Han occupy the cultural center of the country (Harrell, 2011). Meanwhile, there is also a frame of racialized nationalism, which emphasizes the cohesion of the Chinese race when explaining “the power ... and longevity of the Chinese nation.” (Cheng, 2011:678)

In conclusion, the United States, Japan, and China each has its own unique composition of ethnic and racial groups. While relative positions of different ethnic and racial groups are ranked hierarchically in the United States, Japan and China both have simultaneously a divide between the natives and the foreigners and a hierarchy among foreigners. In China, a divide between the Han ethnicity and ethnic minorities also exists. Each site equips people with a unique set of frames. A wide range of frames is used in the United States to understand ethnic and racial matters, including liberalism/individualism, naturalization, cultural racism, minimization of racism, and universalism. On the contrary, Japan and China have narrower sets of ethnic and racial frames. Both Japanese and Chinese are said to be racialized national identities. In Japan, xenophobia and multiculturalism are the two opposing frames used to talk about the existence of foreigners in the society. In China, the Social Darwinist frame explains both a global racial hierarchy and internal ethnic diversity.

METHODOLOGY

To study migrants' perceptions of the positioning of ethnic and racial groups in host societies, I conducted qualitative interviews with 54 Chinese international students studying abroad. Half of the students were studying at two private universities in New York City; the other half at one public university and two private universities in Tokyo. I selected these sites because, pertinent to the purpose of this study, both New York City and Tokyo are large metropolitan areas with high levels of ethnic and racial diversity and are traditional destinations of international migrants in the two countries (Kritz and Gurak, 2015; Ministry of Justice, 2017). Recruiting from both private and public institutions in Tokyo should not pose problems for the comparability of the two samples: the selected institutions all host large numbers of international students and have a similar level of academic prestige domestically and internationally (Open Doors Report, 2017b).

I selected to conduct in-depth interviews with Chinese students as opposed to surveys because interviewing is recognized as an ideal method to extricate “the common frames, style, and racial stories used by racial groups” to explain their experiences and ideas (Bonilla-Silva, 2003:78). Participants were recruited through: 1) personal networks and snowballing; 2) advertisements posted on online chat groups of Chinese international students; 3) recruitment emails sent to potential participants' school email addresses (email addresses were retrieved by contact information associated with Chinese last names available on graduate schools' websites).

Table 2. Basic information of respondents

U.S. Interviews						Japanese Interviews					
I.D.	Institutions	Level of Study	Gender	Age	Recruited by	I.D.	Institutions	Level of Study	Gender	Age	Recruited by
CWT	C	Master	Female	23	Referral	WXW	W	Master	Female	25	Referral
WJY	C	Master	Female	23	Referral	HJY	W	Master	Female	26	Referral
SYX	C	Master	Female	23	Referral	MX	W	Master	Male	24	Referral
XYN	C	Master	Female	23	Social Media	LIN	W	Master	Male	25	Referral
RWQ	C	Master	Female	24	Referral	SM	W	Master	Male	25	Referral
XYH	C	Master	Female	24	Referral	RUI	T	Master	Female	23	Referral
ZQH	C	Master	Female	26	Social Media	ZQ	T	Master	Female	24	Social Media
TYK	C	Master	Male	26	Social Media	JM	T	Master	Female	24	Social Media
LGY	C	PhD	Female	26	Referral	ZYJ	T	Master	Female	24	Social Media
PP	C	PhD	Female	27	Referral	MD	T	Master	Female	24	Social Media
SRB	C	PhD	Female	28	Email	HXX	T	Master	Female	25	Social Media
CW	C	PhD	Male	28	Social Media	JY	T	Master	Male	24	Referral
LYC	C	PhD	Male	29	Referral	XH	T	Master	Male	24	Social Media
CMH	C	PhD	Male	29	Social Media	YS	T	Master	Male	24	Social Media
LYZ	N	Master	Male	23	Referral	LEE	T	Master	Male	24	Social Media
LYK	N	Master	Male	24	Social Media	HYH	T	Master	Male	26	Referral
LX	N	PhD	Female	26	Email	CYQ	T	Master	Male	28	Referral
SMM	N	PhD	Female	27	Email	CS	T	PhD	Female	26	Referral
YXQ	N	PhD	Female	29	Email	WMF	T	PhD	Female	27	Social Media
LC	N	PhD	Male	23	Email	YY	T	PhD	Female	30	Social Media
LXP	N	PhD	Male	23	Email	HZ	T	PhD	Male	25	Referral
RD	N	PhD	Male	24	Email	WSC	T	PhD	Male	25	Referral
ZS	N	PhD	Male	25	Email	WM	K	Master	Female	27	Social Media
YS	N	PhD	Male	26	Email	LYF	K	Master	Male	27	Referral
WTC	N	PhD	Male	27	Referral	YH	K	PhD	Female	26	Social Media
WY	N	PhD	Male	28	Email	WXY	K	PhD	Female	30	Referral
GXX	N	PhD	Male	28	Email	ZTF	K	PhD	Male	24	Referral

Table 2 presents the basic information of the Chinese students interviewed for this study. The resulting sample has equal numbers of females and males. The average age of the respondents was 25 in both New York and Tokyo. The New York sample has roughly equal number of respondents from each school. The Tokyo sample has more respondents in the public institution, and the remaining respondents are equally distributed between the two private institutions. Because Japanese graduate schools rarely post information of grad students online, all respondents in Japan were recruited through Chinese social media or personal referrals.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted from May 2018 to January 2019, and each interview averaged about two and a half hours. Most interviews were conducted in public spaces selected by the interviewees, such as coffee shops and meeting rooms in school. All interviews were conducted in Chinese and recorded with respondents' consent. The interview schedule included questions on the following topics: classification of major ethnic and racial groups in the host society, perceived relative positions of the identified groups in the host society and their explanations, and ethnic and racial matters in China. (The complete interview guide is included

in the Appendix.)

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. In vivo codes were used extensively in order to capture discursive patterns for interpreting ethnic and racial relations. Then, relationships between codes are visualized by plotting them on spreadsheets. Finally, major frames were identified by analyzing the resulting networks of the discursive expressions.

FINDINGS FOR THE INTERVIEWS IN THE UNITED STATES

Perceived Positioning of Ethnic and Racial Groups in the United States

All 27 Chinese students I interviewed perceive the United States as a country with a substantial ethnic and racial hierarchy. Usually, respondents would start talking about one specific ethnic and racial group and compare its relative status to other groups. Most discussions are centered around four major groups: Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians¹. Despite respondents' unanimous agreement upon the existence of an ethnic and racial hierarchy in the United States, the exact orders of how they rank the groups vary, depending on the criteria under consideration. Respondents cited a wide range of factors to construct their perceived positioning of groups in the United States: average occupational status, economic wellbeing, educational attainment, and political influence and representation. Different criteria were often used together by respondents to assess positions of different groups.

Perceived positioning of groups based on socioeconomic wellbeing: Whites>Asians>Latinos>=Blacks

When the focus is on socioeconomic wellbeing, all respondents agree upon the following hierarchy: Whites are positioned above Asians, who in turn are ranked higher than Latinos, and blacks are positioned at the bottom rung of the racial and ethnic hierarchy.

Talking about Whites' socioeconomic status relative to other groups, most of the respondents argued that Whites' position at the top of the hierarchy is because, as stated by many

¹ It is important to note that respondents mostly refer to East Asians when talking about Asians in the United States, reflecting their own ethnocentrism. This does not mean they are oblivious of the existence of other Asian groups. However, this paper only focuses on the most consistently mentioned groups for the sake of simplicity.

respondents, “Whites occupy top positions of major institutions”, “controlling most resources” and “making big decisions in this society.” Some respondents speculated that Whites enjoy more opportunities of employment and promotion. One female student said: “all the famous CEOs and CFOs I have seen on television are Whites.” This observation echoes with many respondents’ belief that Whites are overly represented in “rich” sectors such as finance and “powerful” sectors such as politics.

With regard to socioeconomic wellbeing, respondents generally agree that Asians are in the middle of this hierarchy. A female student who majored in social sciences said: “Asians are the best performing group among minorities. They have high economic status as well as educational attainment. They have well paid jobs, such as in high tech industries.”

However, Asians are still seen by respondents as positioned below whites because of structural barriers in the workplace. Many respondents perceived that Asians tend to concentrate in STEM related jobs. In addition, over a quarter of the respondents mentioned the glass ceiling faced by Asians in career advancement. For example, one male PhD STEM student, drew on his own observations of his friends in the United States, said:

It’s easy for Asians to live a comfortable middle-class life in this country. But it is very difficult for them to move beyond that. I know many people working as quants (quantitative analysts) in finance or programmers in IT. They all make decent amount of money, but their development all stopped after having been in the companies for five years...They just think Asians lack leadership or social skills.

Consequently, according to most respondents, Asians are concentrated around middle-class condition, with smaller standard deviations: fewer Asians in both top and the bottom.

Almost all respondents agreed that Blacks on average suffer greater economic disadvantages relative to other groups in the United States. Many of the respondents observed that Blacks hold more manual jobs and tend to take lower ranked jobs in more prestigious

sectors. For example, when asked to explain why he thought Blacks constitute a disadvantaged group, a male PhD student in humanities answered:

In my department, all the professors are white guys, and I think many other departments are the same. However, almost all the departmental secretaries I have met are Blacks. I mean, even when Blacks are hired in academia, they still only get to do the basic work.

For a large number of my respondents, Blacks compose a large proportion of the visibly unemployed population. Black neighborhoods are often described as poor, dirty, underdeveloped, and crime-ridden. One female student, describing her visit into a black neighborhood, said:

I felt really awkward. The floor was very dirty, sticky, and dark. Everything seems to be decaying, and people dressed very outdatedly. (Wearing) dirty worn-out jeans and filthy T shirts, they looked like as if they were going to rob me the next second. (Blacks in this neighborhood are) very different from Blacks in (lower) Manhattan, many of whom are very handsome and fashionable. Those Blacks look very energetic, wearing all the trendy brands. You can tell the class difference just by their looks.

Apparent from the last part of the above quote, respondents do recognize visible class differences among Blacks in the United States: they regularly brought up black celebrities such as Barack Obama and famous athletes to illustrate this internal variation. However, despite a few cases, it seems that a Black middle class is largely missing from respondents' discourses. As one female M.A. student put it: "Blacks are more concentrated in lower middle or lower class, despite a second spike in the upper half of class conditions."

Lastly, respondents' perceptions of Latinos' position on this socioeconomic-wellbeing-based hierarchy are more ambiguous. This ambiguity is partially due to respondents' unfamiliarity and lack of interactions with Latinos. For example, multiple respondents suggested that they "really don't know much about Latino's status in the United States," and they "rarely see Latinos other than at food trucks."

Nevertheless, among the respondents who know something, some perceive them to be

positioned above Blacks in the U.S. racial hierarchy. One respondent said: “they probably are doing better than Blacks. I mean even though they tend to do lower-end jobs, but they still have jobs. They are not homeless.” Some respondents see their status to be lower than Blacks because “Latinos as a group has the lowest income level.” Contemplating the possibility that Latinos are actually lower than Blacks, a male M.A. student recalled: “I mean, at least I have seen Blacks working on Wall Street, but I have never seen Mexicans there.”² Other respondents just put Latinos and Blacks in a similar position. A female student suggested: “they should be similar to Blacks, having low educational attainment and working more labor-intensive jobs.”

Perceived positioning of groups based on political standing: Whites>Blacks>=Latinos>Asians

More than half of the respondents perceive a very different hierarchy of racial ethnic groups in the United States when the focal criteria is on political standing. In this hierarchy, Whites still occupy the top, who are followed by Blacks and Latinos, with Asians at the bottom. The level of political involvement and influence and received policy benefits are key factors in shaping respondents’ construction of this hierarchy.

For all respondents who have brought up this positioning of groups based on political standing, Whites are still considered as the top. They suggested that “many politicians and high officials are Whites.” Whites’ highest economic power is also seen as directly linked to their high political power. For example, one male student said: “The main body of the United States is controlled by Whites because a lot of Silicon Valley managers and bosses are Whites. Economic status determines political influence.”

² Roughly half of the respondents referred to Latinos as Mexicans when giving concrete examples of observed Latinos’ economic well-being in New York City. Interestingly, they referred to this group more as “Hispanics” or “Latinos” when talking about Latino students in school. Some respondents also mentioned groups such as “Cubans” and “Dominicans” in Miami. Various ways of referring to Latinos reflect this group’s internal differences and its pattern of geographic dispersion.

However, respondents spent much more time talking about Blacks' relative political advantages (sometimes including Latinos') to Asians. One respondent suggested: "in terms of political standing, it's difficult to distinguish between Whites and Blacks. Blacks' political influence is way higher than that of Asians." Respondents believe that Blacks are more active in pursuing group level political goals, as evidenced by the popularity of Black Life Matters movement.

Many respondents think that Blacks are treated better by societal institutions than Asians, as reflected in policies such as affirmative action. Public discourse on political correctness is also perceived to be mostly concerned about Black female M.A. student exclaimed about the unfair treatment received by Asians:

The whole thing about political correctness and racial equality is just a compromise between Blacks and Whites. It has nothing to do with Asian. Stereotyping Asians was considered okay at the Oscar just last year!

Similarly, respondents reported seeing more Latino politicians than Asian politicians and that political debates on issues such as immigration are centered mainly around Latino immigrants. For example, when asked to comparing Latinos' and Asians' positions, one male PhD student asserted: "I am sure Latinos are higher than Asians. Now debates on DACA are so heated. Politicians are more willing to speak for their own interests than Asians."

As can be seen from the above quote, Asians are considered by respondents to be the most disadvantaged group in the United States on the political dimension of the U.S. racial and ethnic hierarchy. They are the least involved in politics. In contrast to other minority groups' progress in pursuing more opportunities, Asians' progress is perceived as stagnant, sometimes even bearing loss from other groups' gains. Many respondents mentioned the hardship faced by Asians during college admission process, which can be illustrated by the following quote by a

male PhD student:

Among all the groups, it is most difficult for Asians to get into good colleges. They need to score way higher than others. Social welfare benefits are all concentrated in Blacks and Latinos. It's the opposite for Asians. They suffer losses.

Finally, unlike the Whites, whose political and economic power match each other, Asians are thought to be an anomaly with higher economic power but low influence in the political sphere. Expressions such as “voicelessly making money” and “having no say, given the money they have” are regularly used by respondents when discussing Asian's supposedly low political standing.

Frames of Understanding Ethnic and Racial Hierarchies in the United States

In this section, I identify and define three major frames of interpreting perceived relative positions of ethnic and racial groups in the United States: starting-point determinism, cultural explanations, and identity-based political incorporation and representation.

Starting-point determinism

I define starting-point determinism as a frame which states that the contemporary positioning of ethnic and racial groups in the United States is largely determined by these groups' entry context into the U.S. society. Regardless of when each group's starting point was, this frame emphasizes that the various forms of inequality – material, human capital, and psychological – already existed when groups first arrived in this land. Then, these inequalities worked in accordance with one another to reproduce advantages and disadvantages for each group.

Almost all respondents rely on this frame, to various degrees, to attribute the causes of Whites' socioeconomic dominance and Blacks' low socioeconomic status. The term “historical legacy” was mentioned repeatedly to account for racial inequality between Blacks and Whites,

and for many respondents, this history meant the history of slavery and the systematic racism against Blacks that followed. For example, a male PhD student suggested:

there was already a class distinction between Blacks and Whites when the former was first introduced to this land. Blacks were slaves, and Whites were masters. Blacks need to overcome this initial class difference to achieve equality with Whites.

This class difference at the beginning is well recognized by most respondents, and it is believed to be linked to unequal wealth accumulation between the two groups.

In addition, many respondents theorize that Blacks in the past had lower human capital due to class subordination. As one female PhD student who has lived in the United States for over ten years put it: “Blacks probably were not granted the rights to receive any education because of their slave status.” Some respondents also believe that this initial class distinction had created psychological advantages and disadvantages for Whites and Blacks respectively. Multiple respondents suggested that being slaves and knowing their own subordination to their white masters could have “instilled in Blacks a sense of inferiority.” Other respondents suggested that the history of slavery could have led Whites to “believe that Blacks are born to be inferior and not suitable for better jobs.”

In contrast to Whites and Blacks, Latinos and Asians are often pictured by respondents as recent immigrants. Consequently, most respondents link Latinos’ and Asians’ relative socioeconomic positions in the United States to economic and political contexts of their countries of origins and their specific migration pathways. Many respondents theorize that, with their home countries being less developed and more politically unstable than Asian countries, Latino immigrants on average have less human and economic capital upon arrival. Moreover, a quarter of the respondents think that Latino immigrants’ starting point is characterized by being undocumented, which can have detrimental effects on the group’s incorporation experience in the

United States.

Respondents emphasis on unequal human capital upon arrival and disparate migration pathways, when accounting for Asians' and Latinos' relative socioeconomic positions, can be best captured by the following quote by a male student who had just finished his first year of graduate school:

They (Asians and Latinos) come to this country with very different statuses. Asians come with authorization. They come to work or study, and a lot of them are at least middle class. There used to be illegal immigrants from China. But now China is well developed, and no one would take the risk of migrating illegally. In contrast, many Latin American countries are still struggling with developing their economy and facing many political issues. Their migrants are not that well-educated. Many of them come as refugees or just want to make some money. They have different motivations (from Asians). They have very limited options for work and make little money, being restricted by their education and status. I think Latino second generation will probably be restricted by their parents' conditions too.

Once unequal starting points were set, the wheel of time rolls on to reproduce inequality. To interpret the positioning of ethnic and racial groups in its current state, this frame of starting-point determinism is combined with three other lines of reasoning: the logic of class reproduction, psychologized discrimination, and universalization of in-group favoritism.

Starting-point determinism + Logic of class reproduction

The logic of class reproduction frame is used by respondents to explain why starting points matter so much. The focal argument of this frame is that inequality reproduces inequality under the current socio-economic system. Respondents regularly use the phrases such as “vicious cycles,” “the poor get poorer,” and “the momentum of poverty” to describe this process. Along this process, increasingly more variations of inequalities are created and passed down through generations. For example, a female master's student suggested:

Blacks were at the lowest position at the beginning, and it turned into a vicious circle. They don't have money, so they have low educational attainment. Then they have to work minimum wage for long hours every day, having no time to take care of their

children. Their children won't get good education because of that.

Stating a similar point, another respondent claimed:

Well their (Blacks') parents probably never benefited from education (because they were not able to get any). It's difficult for a child to keep working on schoolwork if their parents and friends don't know much about it... without good education, they will be despised further by others. It will be even more difficult for them to gain knowledge or find good jobs.

As demonstrated in the above quotes, the suggested prevalence of lower level of educational attainment among Blacks is believed to cause: 1) economic hardship; 2) lesser value put upon education; 3) lack of positive community influences promoting academic achievement; 4) reinforcement of negative stereotypes of Blacks.

The proposed prevalence of poverty among Blacks is also thought of by many respondents as responsible for their "statistically high crime rates." On the one hand, respondents think that "poverty gives birth to vices" because unsatisfied needs need to be met through illegal means. On the other hand, a couple respondents speculate that neighborhood-level poverty leads to insufficient public funding on policing, which in turn causes high crime rates among Black neighborhoods.

Respondents' theorization of Black neighborhoods' effects on exacerbating Blacks' disadvantages reminds us William Wilson's discussion on inner city's "concentration effects," which states that the concentration of least advantaged Blacks in ghettos has created "a social milieu significantly different from the environment that existed in these communities." (1987, 58) According to Wilson, higher-income Black families' exit from inner city leads to difficulty in maintaining basic social institutions such as schools and stores which provide education and job opportunities. Deteriorating social institutions leads to declining social organization of Black neighborhoods, which includes "explicit norms and sanctions against aberrant behaviors" and the

existence of conventional role models (1987:138).

Interestingly, many respondents pointed out that similar mechanisms can affect poor families all over the world. As one female M.A. student asserted: “this is not a problem found only among black families. Instead, all lower income families face the same difficulties.”

Respondents theorized that class reproduction also leads to Whites’ continuous socioeconomic domination. Multiple respondents suggested that more educational opportunities and social resources make Whites better educated and provide them more opportunities for social mobility. A male M.A. student stated: “Many current high-level executives were probably promoted more than a decade ago. I mean it is likely that back then fewer minorities were qualified for those jobs (given that they didn’t have equal access to education).” Similarly, some respondents believe that a sense of confidence and superiority was cultivated in Whites by their colonizing history. As a female student put it:

Well, they were the first here to build their country, of course they would think of themselves as leaders and as superior to others. This society was already formed upon the appreciation of the Whites. These positive impressions and their confidence will just reinforce their privileges.

Over time, this complex of initial material, human capital, and psychological advantages continues to evolve and expand, resulting in Whites’ continuous class domination.

Lastly, perceived polarization of socioeconomic wellbeing among Asian immigrants again emphasizes the importance of entry point and the logic of class reproduction in group positioning in the United States. Recent generations of Asian immigrants were said by respondents to be “on average middle class” and having “higher cultural confidence” upon arrival. In contrast, respondents suggested that older generations of Asian immigrants “were somehow smuggled into the United states for a better life,” but “their lives are hard and they are poor.” Their children are “also more likely to lack a broad vision and ambition.” A female PhD

student, when describing her new friend – an immigrant girl in Chinatown, said:

She came here with her parents without authorization. Her life is so different from ours, living in a neighborhood still looking like what China was like fifty years ago. She has been saving money for years, and now she is deciding whether she should go to college. I don't know why she is even thinking about not going to college as an option, since she already has the money.

To sum up, respondents combine the frame of starting-point determinism and the logic of class reproduction to explain ethnic and racial inequality on socioeconomic wellbeing.

Material, human capital, and psychological-level inequalities at the starting points work together to reproduce class inequalities. Different forms of inequalities are often seen as interrelated and difficult to identify the exact causal directions for.

Starting-point determinism + Psychologized discrimination

Almost all respondents believe that institutionalized discrimination against Blacks and other groups does not exist in contemporary United States. However, most respondents suggested that racial biases and prejudices must still exist. Accordingly, the vast majority of so-called racial discriminations, whether experienced in police encounters or in job markets, are attributed by respondents to psychological factors, which will be referred to as the frame of psychologized discrimination.

For example, over a quarter of respondents are aware of police brutality against Blacks. They attribute such unfair treatments received by Blacks to police officers' individual biases against Blacks, such as "seeing them as more dangerous." However, more than half of these respondents were unsure whether such individual practices constituted racism, or they could be just reflecting the universal human tendency of relying on stereotypes or "a priori knowledge" to direct actions in unfamiliar encounters. As one PhD student put it:

Regardless of what the cause is, statistically speaking, Blacks do seem to have higher crime rate. Therefore, based on this fact, it is natural for police officers, as human

beings, to perceive similarities among people: how many black criminals they have seen as opposed to other people? What actions they should take when encountering potential criminals?

Multiple respondents also mention that they have heard of Blacks encountering discrimination in hiring practices, and the roots of these discriminations are most often attributed to employers' personal biases as well. For example, when asked about whether discrimination against Blacks still exists, a female M.A. student answered:

I think so. Even though there are many diversity programs, stereotypes still exist. It's natural that humans have biases. They (employers) might see that Blacks' communities are poor and have bad securities and that Blacks are more involved in crimes on news. They might conclude from these that Blacks are problematic and choose not to hire them.

These biases are seen by respondents as the psychological legacy of the slavery and its resulting history of class inequality between Whites and Blacks. Many respondents recognize that poverty and its consequences have created stereotypes of Blacks as being "poor," "less educated," "more violent and criminal," "not suitable for managerial jobs," and so on.

However, despite the racist root of racial stereotypes in United States, reliance on stereotypes and bias is believed to be universal and justifiable in most human societies. According to my respondents, it serves a practical function by reducing the cost of communication, and it is also based on some level of truth. Stereotypes, prejudices, and biases are all understood by respondents as attributing a whole group of people similar characteristics based on some "non-representative facts" and the resulting attitudes towards the stereotyped group.

In fact, many respondents perceive racial discriminations in the United States as similar to regional discriminations in China. As one respondent said:

Well, in China, we have stereotypes of people from different regions. Henan people are all frauds, and Dongbei people are all rude and have no culture. It's similar to people

discriminating against Blacks here and thinking they are dangerous.

This quote illustrates two focuses of the frame: 1) discriminations against ethnic and racial groups are largely perceived as in people's minds; 2) prejudices and bias against groups of people constitute a universal phenomenon. Therefore, according to respondents, it is very difficult to eliminate bias and prejudices. However, psychologized discrimination helps to reproduce inequality in the United States, where class memberships and ethnic and racial memberships are highly correlated.

Starting-point determinism + Universalization of in-group favoritism

Universalization of in-group favoritism states that favoring one's own group when making social connections is a universal human tendency. It is mostly used to explain why Whites tend to occupy top decision-making positions in societal institutions. According to this line of reasoning, Whites are able to occupy the top positions and constitute the majority of an organization early on because of their accumulated advantages. After all the important spots of an organization are initially filled in, Whites are already in control of making important decisions such as employing and promoting. In-group favoritism then plays a role in determining those who get favored by these white decision makers.

For example, reflecting on her frustrating experience of job searching, a first year M.A. student who went to a prestigious college in the United States speculated:

It is obvious that those white blonde girls from rich families tend to get offers from top investment banks. Maybe it's not that Whites are intentionally being discriminatory. It is just easier for them to make connections with the interviewers. Those in high positions (in corporations) are all Whites; they tend to pick Whites with similar backgrounds. Well, I guess sharing similar backgrounds makes working together easier. People all like those who are similar to themselves. I mean, Whites are trying to be more inclusive with much effort; on the other hand, it is just difficult and maybe unnecessary to overcome the natural closeness they feel among themselves.

In the most simplistic way, some respondents claimed that it is a universal human

tendency for people to feel closer to people like themselves. Many respondents observed that different ethnic and racial groups in the United States tend to mostly have their own communities: “Whites, Blacks, and Asians all just like to play with themselves,” because “it’s natural for people with similar cultural backgrounds to gather.” In addition, respondents regularly used Chinese examples to illustrate the ubiquity of in-group favoritism. For example, one respondent said: “In China, we don’t have races, but I still hung out with mostly Hunan (province) people when I was in Shenzhen”.

What are the focal similarities under consideration and why they are important?

Multiple respondents drew on biological arguments. As one respondent put it: “human history started with tribes competing with each other for valuable resources. It became human nature to distinguish us from the other. Skin color is just a very easy indicator of difference.”

However, more respondents focused on cultural differences when making sense of this proposed in-group favoritism. They suggested that despite growing up in the United States, different ethnic and racial groups still have many cultural differences such as traditional values, lifestyles, and ways of socializing. Linked to groups’ starting points in this country, cultural differences are believed to be partially rooted in class differences. For instance, one respondent suggested:

Even when a black and a white person both work on Wall Street, that black person may have worked their own way there, while the white may just have benefited from their good family. Therefore, they might still have very different styles of working or values.

To sum up, respondents believe that in-group favoritism is a universal phenomenon. In the context of hiring and promoting, cultural differences among groups and similarities within groups promote in-group favoritism: people like to work with people with whom they share cultures. However, this seemingly innocent practice reinforces ethnic and racial inequality in

socio-economic well-being if groups were already stratified at the beginning. Consequently, advantaged groups – mostly Whites – get to keep their privilege as a group merely by favoring their in-group members.

Cultural explanations of ethnic and racial hierarchies

Respondents apply cultural explanations to understand both relative positions of groups on the socioeconomic and political hierarchies. The frame of cultural explanations, used by more than two thirds of the respondents, suggests that specific cultural aspects of a group such as values and traditions are responsible for that group's relative position in the society.

When culture is used to explain Blacks' economic hardship, it resonates with oppositional culture theory, which emphasizes the adversarial culture as disadvantaged group's response to material hardships and structural discriminations (Ogbu, 1978). Multiple respondents argue that Blacks are partially responsible for their own misfortune in the U.S. society, and these faults are mostly seen as resulting from the history of slavery or economic deprivation.

For example, speaking about the influence of current material deprivation, multiple respondents suggested that Blacks "do not value education enough" because they lack the experience of being rewarded for it. Again, some suggested that this oppositional culture can be found among poor communities other than those of Blacks. As one respondent put it:

It's like in rural China, people are poor, and the poorer they are, the more children they have. These children are then not well educated. For them, finding a lowly-paid job in city is more practical than getting education.

The inverse of the oppositional culture narrative is used to explain Asians' relatively high economic achievement. A majority of respondents think that Asians "value education more," which is linked to Asians' material realm of social life. Many respondents reasoned that recent Asian immigrants are more aware of returns to education and more willing to invest in

their children's education, precisely because they are selected into the country by their educational achievement. According to one respondent, "They are the living proof of education/knowledge changes one's fate." As parents often try to pass down to children what they think is beneficial to them based on their own experiences, respondents think that Asian parents in the United States teach their children the value of education and invest more in children's education. This is similar to Lee and Zhou's idea of Asian immigrant families bringing with them a middle-class mindset, which emphasizes the value of education (2015).

Specific aspects of Asian culture are also used to explain the perceived low political status of Asians in the United States. A small number of respondents proposed a typical Asian personality characterized by forbearance and being self-contained: Asians "tend not to voice their discontent" and "prefer to have potential conflicts minimized," which makes them less likely to mobilize. In addition, some respondents think that Asians lack of solidarity and are only interested in individual advancements in the society. Respondents linked this lack of engagement in politics to political traditions of their home countries, especially that of China. One male PhD student claimed, "Traditionally, Chinese commoners avoided talking about politics to avoid troubles. The focus has always been on self-sufficiency under the peasant economy since ancient China." Meanwhile, multiple respondents speculate that recent immigrants from Asian countries also brought with them low levels of political engagement acquired back at home. As one respondent put it: "People in Japan is the same. They don't have much interest in politics." Therefore, according to respondents, political activities are not encouraged historically encouraged through Asian culture.

As seen above, the most commonly used cultural explanations are often connected to concrete material realities, whether the material reality is specific political and economic

systems, educational backgrounds, or class conditions.

Identity-based political incorporation and representation

This last frame emphasizes the connection between population size and identity-based political representations when determining group's political standing under the U.S. political system. Many respondents see Blacks' high political status as resulting from their political activism, let it be the civil rights movement or the black life matters movement. The success of these movements benefits from the relatively large population size of Blacks. According to one male M.A. student, "There are so many Blacks in this country, they have the courage and the stake to resist and rebel."

More importantly, many respondents pointed out that population size determines the number of votes each group holds. All non-Asian groups constitute considerable proportions of the U.S. society, and their needs are to be considered because of the large number of votes they hold. For example, when asked to explain his perception of higher political standing of Latinos, one male PhD student stated:

Latinos are not doing well economically, but there are many of them. In California, they are a major source of votes for the Democrats. Politicians obviously would want to represent their interests in order to get their votes.

Following a similar logic, multiple respondents suggested that Asians' group interests will be less of a concern to political leaders due to the limited number of votes held by Asians.

Respondents' consistent emphasis on population size in determining group's political status reveals their perceived centrality of identity-based representation in U.S. politics.

Comparing the U.S. political system to that of China, a male respondent stated:

Here is different from China. In China, you don't have to struggle for your interests, and even if you do so, it will be futile. Decisions are all made by the central government. They decide whether you get what you want or not.

On the contrary, policies regarding resource allocations in the United States are always understood by respondents as outcomes of political debates and struggles. Politicians representing interests of different constituencies, in addition to grass-roots activism, are seen as key actors in such debates and struggles. All these factors determine groups' political standings in the U.S. society.

FINDINGS FOR THE INTERVIEWS IN JAPAN

Perceived Positioning of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Japan

Most respondents in Japan perceive two sets of positioning of major ethnic and racial groups. First, there is a Japanese and foreigners divide. Then, there is a hierarchy among foreigners. Unlike respondents in the United States, respondents in Japan use a much narrower range of criteria and often rely on indirect evidences to corroborate their perceptions of groups' relative positions. For both patterns of positioning of ethnic and racial groups, attitudes of Japanese people and mass media are major source materials for inferences among all respondents.

The Japanese and foreigners divide

When asked to enumerate ethnic and racial groups residing in Japan, all respondents had no hesitance to first bring up the "Japanese." Then, when referring to non-Japanese groups, respondents either lumped them together as "foreigners" or categorized them according to major regions and countries of origins such as "Asians other than Japanese," "Europeans and Americans," "Chinese," "Vietnamese," etc.

For most respondents, Japanese and foreigners are apparently two very different groups in Japan. The positioning of the two groups is characterized by exclusion rather than a vertical hierarchy. For example, when asked about the relative positions of foreigners and Japanese, a male M.A. student claimed: "they are just two different circles. It's not like who is higher or who is lower, it's just that they don't even overlap."

Most respondents infer this divide between Japanese and foreigners through observing

Japanese' attitudes towards the two groups. Many of them complained about "an invisible wall" separating Japanese and foreigners. One female student stated: "In Japan, foreigners will always be treated as a different kind." Multiple respondents observed that Japanese tend to keep distance from foreigners, and they do not treat foreigners as how they treat their fellow Japanese.

Interestingly, multiple respondents brought up experiences of being "complimented" by natives as "being very Japanese" to illustrate the perceived deep divide between Japanese and foreigners. An outgoing female master student shared one of her annoyances:

This Japanese girl I know one day texted me. She said: "Oh! In my opinion you are Japanese, because you are my nakama (can be translated into friends or the same kind)!" I was very shocked at that moment! So, foreigners can't be their nakama? Japanese are nakama only among themselves?

Meanwhile, media portrayals of foreigners are regularly used by some respondents as indirect evidence supporting the perceived Japanese and foreigner divide. For example, one male student said:

They like to report crimes committed by foreigners on television. I mean they surely cover Japanese crimes too. However, whenever a crime is committed by a non-Japanese, they will definitely say it in the news title.

The abundance of Japanese television shows focusing on differences between Japan and foreign countries is another piece of evidence for multiple respondents. One female student who was about to start working in Japan speculated about the motivations for such shows:

They try to be open to the outside world by showing cultures different from Japan. However, by doing so, they reinforce how unique Japanese culture is. It is rather because of such thinking, they would come up with television shows like that.

In addition, institutionalized exclusions are cited by respondents as evidence of foreigners' difficulty to blend into the Japanese society. A quarter of the respondent suggest that foreigners face more restrictions in career choice and advancements in Japan: they can't apply to certain jobs and can rarely be promoted beyond mid-level positions in firms. Outside of work,

over two thirds of the respondents recognize that one big obstacle faced by foreigners is housing. Many respondents reported seeing explicit indications of “foreigners not allowed” on housing ads and “being rejected during inquiries” as the most common and explicit differential treatments they had experienced in Japan.³

Hierarchy among foreigners: European and Americans > Asians (and others)

While the Japanese and foreigners divide is seen as an insider-outsider divide, the majority of the respondents also perceive a vertical hierarchy among foreigners. More specifically, most respondents conceive the hierarchy among foreigners in Japan as Europeans and American at the top and Asian nationals at the bottom.⁴

Again, respondents infer positioning of different groups of foreigners through observing Japanese’ attitudes towards them. Respondents regularly mentioned that Japanese are “more enthusiastic around Europeans and Americans” but show much less interest to other Asian foreigners. Such a gap is observed at various settings, including schools, tourist locations, social events, etc. As a third year PhD student who went to college in Japan put it:

I have seen too many incidences that showed how much Japanese people admire Europeans and Americans. In college, we often ate out with the whole class, and whenever there were some European and American students at the table, the Japanese students would just all be gravitated toward them. I have never seen them being so interested in other international students.

In addition to being more “enthusiastic,” many respondents suggest that Japanese are also more “tolerant” of Europeans’ and Americans’ mistakes. Multiple respondents mentioned

³ Denying access to important resources such as work and housing based on one’s ascribed characteristics constitutes discrimination. However, it is interesting that such phenomena are understood as differential treatments towards foreigners in Japan – a much milder expression than discrimination. This confirms the literature which states that racial and ethnic discrimination often passes as xenophobia in Japan due to a lack of public discourses on race and ethnicity in Japan.

⁴ These general observations are in accordance with previous studies on this topic. For example, Shunsuke Tanabe (2008) found that Japanese preferences towards various nations follow a “high western and low eastern-type” rank ordering, where Japanese have more favorable attitudes towards foreigners from western nations and more negative attitudes toward those from other East Asian nations, especially Chinese who are often ranked at the bottom of the hierarchy (Tanabe, 2008; Igarashi, 2008).

the existence of a “double standard”: behaviors not conforming to Japanese standards conducted by Asians are attributed to bad manners and low quality, while similar behaviors of Europeans and Americans are seen as due to cultural differences. For example, a male student who has studied in Japan for 3 years recalled one such incidence:

I was on subway with a bunch of American friends. They were kind of drunk, singing and speaking very loudly. However, it was weird that no Japanese on the train seemed to be bothered by it. I mean I have seen them being really annoyed by Chinese talking loudly on subway. I told my friends to keep their volume down. One of them just said: “I am American, I don’t need to be quiet.”

Mass media, mainly television shows, is another major source for inferring hierarchy among foreigners in Japan. According to most respondents, Chinese in Japan are “almost often portrayed negatively” on television, such as by “exposing their bad manners” and “reporting their crimes.” Vietnamese in Japan are said to increasingly experience a similar situation. However, when the purpose of the show is to get valuable opinions from non-Japanese people, the foreigners shown become overwhelmingly European and American.⁵ This later observation can be illustrated by the following quote by a female M.A. student:

There is a television show that interviews foreigners about their reasons for visiting Japan. Most foreigners got interviewed are Europeans and Americans. There are also shows talking about Japanese tourist sites that are popular among foreign visitors. However, even when most visitors at those sites are Chinese, they will still just pick European and American subjects. They probably only care about what Europeans and Americans think about them.

It is important to point out there are disagreements on who counts as Europeans and Americans among my respondents. For many of them, Europeans and Americans in Japan mainly mean white foreigners. Other respondents think whoever is born in or comes from that

⁵ Comparing the actual data of foreigners entering Japan and foreign visitors interviewed by a variety television show during the same period, Yonekura found: while more than 60% of the visitors were from Asian countries during the time period, they constituted less than 20% of foreigners interviewed by the show. On the other hand, while both European and American visitors constituted less than 15% of the total number of visitors during that period, 40% and 30% of foreign visitors interviewed by the show were Europeans and Americans respectively (2015).

region counts. While one respondent suggested: “Asians and Blacks from Europe and America might not be seen as Europeans and Americans.” Another respondent believed this category “includes all non-Asian looking foreigners.”

In conclusion, unlike respondents in the United States, respondents in Japan rarely use objective criteria, such as socioeconomic outcomes or political representations, to construct the positioning of ethnic and racial groups. Rather, they perceive groups’ positions through the inferred perspectives of the Japanese. Since they are not Japanese, respondents gather pieces of evidence that convey to them either directly or implicitly Japanese perspectives.⁶

Frames for Understanding Relative Positions of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Japan

Essentialized uniqueness of Japanese

Essentialized uniqueness of Japanese attributes the cause of the Japanese and foreigner distinction to Japanese social and cultural characteristics. These characteristics are seen as essential to what Japan is. One most mentioned characteristic of Japan is “homogeneity.” Over half of the respondents emphasized that Japan is not an immigrant country but a nation state, and it has always been exclusive. They argued that, lacking a big immigrant population as well as internal diversity, as put by a male PhD student, “the Japanese way of life is the only way of life in Japan.” According to these respondents, any deviations from the Japanese standards will be marked as being outsiders.

This great value put on homogeneity is sometimes portrayed by respondents as the fundamental social norm organizing a wide range of social relations in Japan. Respondents recognized a high level of unity organizing the Japanese education system (“schools in Japan are

⁶ In addition to television shows, a third of the respondents perceive environmental cues of Japanese society’s bias against Chinese, such as “flyers written in Chinese reminding people of basic manners” and “piles of books depicting China through negative lenses” in bookstores.

all about standard scores”), social class structure (“all Japanese are middle class”), and geographic environments people live in (“over one tenth of Japanese are in Tokyo”). This national characteristic is then linked to interpersonal and individual traits. Multiple respondents suggested that the fear of being different is always haunting Japanese people: “wearing different clothes,” “outperforming peers in school,” and even “being more physically attractive” could all lead to potential exclusion from important social groups such as co-workers and classmates.

Why is homogeneity so valued in Japan? Focusing on exclusion of foreigners, several respondents suggest that since Japan is an “island nation,” it is geographically and culturally more isolated than countries on major continents. A male student compared Japan to the United Kingdom:

Island nations tend to be less open to the outside world. They are very insulated. Don’t British people also have very high pride of themselves? Aren’t they going to quit EU? They just don’t want to mingle with other people.

Another respondent made efforts to connect homogeneity to Japan’s defeat in WWII: “maybe Japanese learned from the history, where they got punished harshly for their over-achievements in military expansion and colonizing Asia.” For most other respondents, homogeneity is said to be a result of itself. The more alike Japanese people are ethnically, socioeconomically, and geographically, the more homogenous its culture becomes, and the more values put on the sameness.

The preference for homogeneity and the lack of exposures to foreign cultures in Japan encourage the exclusion of foreigners. Exclusion of foreigners is almost always interpreted as resulting from natives’ anticipation of foreigners not knowing the Japanese norms. For example, multiple respondents suggested that Japanese landlords will not rent to foreigners because they assume that “foreigners don’t know how to treat the apartment properly,” and that Japanese

companies will not promote foreigners because “foreigners don’t know how to interact with Japanese clients.”

To sum up, using the frame of the essentialized uniqueness of Japanese, respondents identify Japan’s geographical location, its historical past, and its domestic configuration as making Japan more exclusive towards foreigners and reproducing a homogeneous society.

Geo-economic and geo-political world order

The frame of geo-economic and geo-political world order states that differential attitudes towards foreigners of various origins in Japan are largely explained by their origins’ positions, mostly relative to that of Japan, on the global economic and political order.

Economic power of foreigners’ countries or regions of origins is the most consistently suggested cause of the perceived hierarchy among foreigners in Japan. Higher status enjoyed by Europeans and Americans is attributed to their home countries’ higher status in the world economic and political system. For example, many respondents suggested that “the West” consists of “developed countries,” with “high levels of economic development,” “advanced technologies,” and “global cultural influences.” Japanese society’s admiration of this more advanced part of world is then believed to be reflected in their attitudes toward individuals from these regions. Multiple respondents theorized that Japanese perceive European and American foreigners as the embodiment of the “high-end” and “upscale” culture of the West. As one female M.A. student put it: “From Japanese’ perspectives, Europeans and Americans come from these fancy places. They are shining and glowing, and it doesn’t matter what they do anymore.”

While the economic power of a country, according to many respondents, “determines impressions of the country and its people,” the specific geo-political position of Japan also matters. Japan’s colonial history in Asia, its political conflicts with China and Korea, and its

political alliance with the West are all perceived as contributing to its sense of superiority to other Asian countries and good feelings towards the West and Westerners. These opposite sentiments towards different parts of the world fit well together as a consistent story for most of the respondents. As a female student put it:

Japan was only able to become the top of Asian countries by absorbing the more advanced western culture. Their education system is mostly modeled upon the German system. The modern democratic political system was like a gift sent from the heaven to them. They didn't need to figure out things themselves like what French and Americans had to. It is only natural for them to admire the West and despise the East.

In addition to these more symbolic values associated with coming from more or less developed regions, many respondents think that economic power of the origins also affects the “quality” of their people, which in turn determines their receptions in Japan. Less developed countries tend to have less educated nationals, and less educated people on average have worse manners. For example, multiple respondents agreed that Europeans and Americans have better qualities because of their better developed countries. Respondent also frequently mentioned that there are in fact many Chinese people with “low qualities” in Japan, “breaking their rules” and “damaging their society.” The following quote by a male M.A. student best demonstrates this connection between national development and educational attainment and quality of people:

Many of these low-quality Chinese are from the older generations. In the 80s and 90s, many Chinese came here illegally to make money. Those people are not that educated, you know, China was not that developed back then. It was not their fault. They had lower qualities because of the country's limited level of development. I think less educated people always have more difficulties to understand various perspectives and values. It will be difficult for them to adapt to other people's rules...I mean, how developed a country is reflected by how many of its citizens are college-educated.

Interestingly, many respondents, when using the frame of geo-economic world order to explain hierarchy among foreigners in Japan, suggested that there is a similar ordering of foreigners in China. Multiple respondents used the expressions such as “reasoning based on how

foreigners are received in China, I would expect that in Japan..." or "it should be very similar to China." This can be seen as respondents transposing the Social Darwinist argument about ethnic and racial hierarchies in China to explain similar phenomena in Japan. However, the frame of geo-economic world order emphasizes that the status is not fixed and is always relative, and thus characteristics of people associated with any region is never essentialized.⁷ Different ethnic and racial groups are said to occupy similar positions under different temporal and spatial contexts and vice versa, and no essential characteristic is assigned to any group.

For example, making a cross-national comparison, some respondents point out similar receptions of Chinese in Japan and Africans in China. When asked to explain the proposed "contempt" against Chinese held by Japanese, A male respondent stated: "I guess how they see us is like how we see Africans. We are all from these less developed, third world countries. We are all (seen as) poor and uncivilized." On the other hand, multiple respondents mentioned the improvement of qualities of Chinese in Japan as China developed quickly during the past couple decades. As China moves ahead, nationals of other less developed countries, as they start to migrate to Japan, assume the bottom position once occupied by Chinese. As a male respondent put it:

Impressions of Chinese have been improving. I saw them talking about it on television too. As Chinese economy develops, more and more young Chinese people here are well-educated. They avoid doing bad things. Now it is the Vietnamese who have both low education and bad manners, such as talking loudly in elevators or making phone calls on subways.

Furthermore, roughly a third of the respondents proposed that changes in global geo-

⁷ This frame reminds us of Wallerstein's world-system theory, which divides the globe into the core, the peripheral, and the semi-peripheral states according to relations of production in the global capitalist economy. This theory also emphasizes that the statuses of states are not fixed (2004). However, because the theory focuses extensively on the relationship between the production process, employing the framework would require further analyses of evidence not directly presented in respondents' discourses in this study. Future studies can explore the applicability of the world-system theory to migrants' perceptions of positioning of ethnic and racial groups in host society.

economic hierarchy lead to contestation of ordering of groups in Japan, which is reflected in Japanese attitudes towards specific groups such as Chinese and Koreans. For example, respondent observed that while Chinese people used to be seen as both poor and low quality in Japan, China's rapid economic growth necessitates a more nuanced image of Chinese in Japan that "helps Japanese maintain their sense of superiority": "the nouveau riche" or "the upstarts." This new image highlights the bad manners while acknowledging Chinese tourists' high ability to consume. Nevertheless, many respondents were able to normalize this new image of Chinese by pointing out that the same image was associated with Japanese in the West during the heydays of their economic development. As one respondent put it:

Japanese public probably like this image of Chinese of being the nouveau riche but with no manners. If I have to guess, there is jealousy involved. They want to feel good about themselves in realms other than economic development. But they used to be like this too. In 70s and 80s, they went all over the world to consume and people didn't like them.

There are more evidences suggesting that phenotypical race is not the main concern under this frame. In addition to the ambiguity of who count as Europeans and Americans as demonstrated earlier in the findings, respondents regularly use "native English speakers" as a stand-in for Europeans and Americans when talking about their supposed higher status in Japan. The supremacy of English as an international language is often attributed as the reason why native English speakers are more popular in Japan. English proficiency brings people admiration from Japanese even if they are not native speakers. The following quote from a female respondent, recalling an incidence where she felt vividly Japanese' admiration of the West, illustrates that English language's global influence confers advantage to its users, irrelevant to the race of the users:

I was at this orientation for this summer school in Japan. I introduced myself, and I said I came from China. No one seemed to care. However, after I said that I had been

studying in the United States since high school, Japanese students suddenly became very interested in me. They all came to me and wanted to talk to me in English.

To sum up, it is very unlikely that the attribution to geo-economic and geo-political influence is only a euphemism for global racial hierarchy, given the evidences found in respondents' discourses. However, it is hard to eliminate the possible salience of race on hierarchy among foreigners in Japan within the scope of this study.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

Key findings of this thesis are presented in Table 3. As shown in the top panel of the table, Chinese students in my U.S. sample perceive two ways of positioning ethnic and racial groups in the United States. The first is an ethnic and racial hierarchy based on socioeconomic wellbeing, the second one based on the relative political standings of groups. Chinese students in Japan also recognize two different patterns of the positioning of groups: a vertical hierarchy among foreigners and a divide between Japanese and foreigners.

The bottom panel of Table 3 demonstrates that dissimilar sets of frames are employed by students in each host country to interpret those perceived orderings and positionings of ethnic and racial groups. The major frames I identified in the U.S. case are: starting-point determinism, cultural explanations, and identity-based political incorporation and representation. Starting-point determinism is combined with three other frames – logic of class reproduction, psychologized discrimination, and universalization of in-group favoritism – to make sense of unequal socioeconomic wellbeing among groups. Students in Japan, in contrast, rely on two frames. Essentialized Japanese uniqueness is used to explain the divide between Japanese and foreigners, and the hierarchy among foreigners is understood through the frame of geo-economic and geo-political world order.

Respondents' perceptions of the positionings of various groups in the two societies are consistent with previous studies, but with some deviations. Groups' relative positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy in the United States correspond well to the general scholarly agreement on this topic (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Kim, 1999; Masuoka & Juun, 2013). The perceived low status

of Asians and high status of Blacks on the political hierarchy is a new finding from my study and contributes to the literature on ethnic and racial ordering in the United States. This finding reminds us of the Triangulation of Asian American Theory, which states that even though Asian Americans are racialized as model minority in the United States they tend to also be racialized as foreign to the country (Kim, 1999). However, for my respondents, the perceived low political ability of pursuing group interests, rather than being seen as foreign, contributes to Asians' low group status in terms of political standing in the United States. Among Chinese students in Japan, the observed Japanese and foreigner divide corresponds well with the racial demarcation line between Japanese and foreigner in Japan in the literature (Kawai, 2015). The observed hierarchy among foreigners in Japan is in accordance with existing findings of Japanese' more favorable attitudes towards foreigners from western nations compared to those from non-western nations, including Chinese (Tanabe, 2008; Igarashi, 2008). These cross-national findings suggest that migrants can perceive relative positions of ethnic and racial groups differently from the conventional view of the host society, depending on the key issue under concern.

Table 3. Positioning and Framing Ethnic and Racial Groups in the United States, Japan: Respondents' Perspectives

	United States	Japan
Positioning of Ethnic and Racial Groups	Hierarchy based on socio-economic wellbeing: Whites>Asians>(Latinos)>=Blacks	Japanese/ Foreigner
	Hierarchy based on political standing: Whites>Blacks>=(Latinos)>Asians	Hierarchy of foreigners based on countries/regions of origins
Frames for Interpretation	Starting Point Determinism	Essentialized Uniqueness of Japanese
	Cultural Explanations	Geo-economic and Geo-political World Order
	Identity-based Incorporation and Representation	
	Minor frames: logic of class reproduction; universalization of in-group favoritism; psychologized discrimination	

My thesis makes several contributions to the literature. First, I show that respondents regularly used examples of social relations from home countries to help explain perceived relative positions of major ethnic and racial groups within the host societies, which corroborates existing research that finds that migrants import racial ideas from home to destinations (Ribas, 2015; Roth

& Kim, 2013). Second, I show that such transnational application of ideas is limited by the perceived level of similarity in ethnic and racial matters between the destination and the home: respondents made easy comparisons made between Japan and China, while rarely applying ethnic and racial frames in China to ethnic and racial issues in the United States.

Third, building on Bonilla-Silva's work of identifying frames of racial ideology in the United States (2017), I introduce alternative frames that are used to think about ethnic and racial inequality in cross national contexts, including universalization of in-group favoritism, less essentialized cultural explanations, starting-point determinism, and psychologized discrimination. Universalization of in-group favoritism extends beyond ethnic and racial groups to include groups based on class or region, and respondents attribute cultural similarities conditioned by material realities as causes for this universal tendency. Both mobility-promoting and mobility-inhibiting cultures are not essentialized to any group. Unlike Bonilla-Silva's respondents who claim that "the past is past," (2017:125), Chinese students emphasize the enduring influence of the past on the present, as captured by the frame of starting-point determinism. The psychologized discrimination frame can be seen an attempt to minimize racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). However, my respondents believe that racial biases exist, which leads to discriminatory behaviors that have consequences on minorities' lives. It is hard to say whether this counts as color-blind racism: resorting to collective psychology is a common practice even among prominent race scholars when accounting for structural racism (Reed & Chowkwanyun 2012).

Finally, I contribute to research on racial discourses in China by analyzing Chinese migrants' perspectives of how geo-economic and geo-political world order affects ethnic and racial hierarchy in a society where Chinese are positioned differently from how they are positioned in China. I highlight the flexibility of such hierarchies that could be easily overlooked without cross

national comparisons. In short, while Social Darwinist frame implies essentialized racial differences, the frame used by my respondents emphasizes the changing nature of the geo-political and geo-economic world order.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. To begin with, can you briefly introduce yourself and explain to me why you are studying in Japan/the U.S.? 先请你简单介绍一下自己吧? 你为什么来日本/美国读书?

Probe: the length of living/studying abroad; reasons for migrating; future plans...

Probe: 你来之之前有什么担心与特别做什么准备吗? 你周围的人呢? 有叮嘱你什么吗?

2. How is your experience so far studying/living in Japan/the U.S.? 到现在为止, 你在日本/美国的体验如何?

Probe: social relationships with others (co-nationals and non-Chinese) at school, at work, at dorms...

Probe: 除了跟中国同学之外, 你还跟哪些人有接触呢?

3. What are some defining experience? 在留学生活中有什么让你特别印象深刻的体验吗?

- 3a. What are some particularly rewarding experience? 有什么有益的/有收获的经历吗?

Probe: Why did they happen? Why rewarding?

Probe: What did you gain? Do you have any strategy to have more rewarding experience like those in general?

- 3b. What are some particularly challenging experience? 有什么你觉得对自己特别有挑战性的体验?

Probe: Why were they challenging?

Probe: How did you overcome them? How do you prepare for challenging experience like those in general?

- 3c. What are some particularly unpleasant experience? 有什么不愉快的经历吗? (recall 最近)

Probe: Why did they happen? Why unpleasant?

Probe: How did you respond? How do you prepare for unpleasant experience like those in general?

ALL: 因为自己的身份是留学生/中国人/少数人群所以特别的经历。

4. Can you recall any encounters in Japan/the U.S. where you were treated unfairly? 你能想起任何在日本/美国被不公平对待的经历吗?

Probe: Why did they happen? Why unfair? How did you respond?

Probe: In general, do you do anything to avoid being treated unfairly?

5. Do you think your experience, as mentioned above, apply to people like you here in Japan/the U.S.

你觉得在美国/日本有哪些人会有跟你类似的经历呢?

哪些人会跟你不一样的经历呢? 为什么会不一样?

Probe: Chinese students/ Chinese/ foreign students/ foreigners/ ethnic and racial minorities?

Probe: What are some similarities and differences between your experience and other groups' experience? Why similar and why differ?

6. In your opinion, what are some different groups of people in Japan/the U.S.?

a. 在你看来, 日本/美国有哪些不同的人群?

How do different groups relate to each other? 他们之间的关系如何?

Where do different groups of people stand in Japan/the U.S.? (including themselves)

他们在美国社会中的地位如何呢?

What are some stereotypes of different groups? What are your opinions/impressions? (including Chinese/ Chinese international students) Have your impressions ever changed (before and after)?

你觉得你自己在美国/日本社会中处于什么样的位置, 什么样的身份? (对中国人的刻板印象)

相对于其他人群呢?

你觉得什么是决定各个人群在社会中位置的重要因素呢?

b. 有哪些关于不同人群的刻板印象? 你觉得呢?

来美 / 日之前, 你对这些不同人群有什么印象吗?

来美 / 日之后, 你对不同人群的印象有改变吗?

你跟各个人群之间印象最深的接触是怎样的?

Probe: why? Does it make sense? (make sure to include the "majority" groups)

Probe: Similar or different to China's context?

c. 你觉得在中国也有类似的情况吗? (probe ethno-racial; ranking in China)

在中国有哪些不同的人群呢? 如果按照语言, 文化, 民族, 信仰的不一样来划分的话?

你觉得各个人群在中国的地位是如何的呢? 如果要让你排他们在中国的社会地位你会怎么排?

你觉得种族关系在中国意味着什么呢?

d. 你觉得在全球范围内来看, 也存在这种不同人群占有不同高低的地位的情况吗?

Probe: Can it be generalized to groups outside Japan/the U.S.? Globally?

7. In your opinion, who are Americans/Japanese? What are they like?

a. 在你看来, 美国人/日本人是哪些人? 他们是怎样的?

b. How would you define your own identity? (ethno-racial) 你自己的种族民族身份呢?

c. How is (your own identity) similar to/ different from Americans/Japanese?

(If own identity not Chinese) How is Chinese similar to/different from Americans/Japanese?

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